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The Truth about Oudh.

It is not necessary in this paper to enquire whether the annexation of Oudh was a just and necessary measure, imperatively called for by the total disorganization of its own native Government, or whether on the contrary it was an act to be condemned, and consequently to be regretted, as one of injustice on the part of the paramount power. Much can be said in support of either opinion. On the throne of Oudh was an imbecile king given up to the most vile and unheard-of debauchery, and led on from vice to vice, from the pursuit of one folly to that of one still more absurd, by a cunning and wily minister who by thus distracting his master's attention from the affairs of state, seized upon the reins of Government such as it was, and amassed immense wealth by every means which the most corrupt and cunning ingenuity could invent. The minister was most ably assisted and aided by a profligate and avaricious durbar, composed, with but very few exceptions, of the vilest creatures, who, whilst pandering to the minister's love of wealth, did not, it will readily be imagined, neglect to fill their own coffers. Never did any of his predecessors so entirely divest himself of the cares of state, as did the ex-king Wajid Ally Shah, and never did any minister enjoy such a great extent of power as did Ally Nucky Khan, power indeed limited only by certain checks, the natural and unavoidable consequence of the existing state of affairs. The king was surrounded by favorites, male and female, all more or less jealous of the influence exercised by the minister on the weak mind of Wajid Ally. But the courtiers of the king, and the

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partizans of the minister, together with the minister himself, were in a great measure subjected to the whims and caprices of a third party, which even in Oudh has enjoyed no little influence and power, we allude to the zunanah, or the king's numerous mahuls, whom it was not always safe or convenient to offend. Between these three parties then, much hostile jealousy existed, and it required no little skill on the part of the minister, to baffle all intrigues and to frustrate all attempts made to effect his ruin. But the apathy and nonchalance of the king, and a judicious distribution of a portion of the spoils, smoothed all difficulties, silenced all clamours, and enabled the minister to continue his career, if not in peace, yet with some degree of security.

But whilst corruption and vice reigned paramount both at the court and in the durbar, it will readily be imagined in what extreme disorder the country was plunged. Offices of the highest trust were openly sold to the highest bidders, who remunerated themselves a thousand-fold, by swallowing up the Revenue of the country, and who, at the same time, purchased a continuance of the favour they enjoyed, by the payment of heavy and well-timed donations, of course at the king's expense. The resources of the country and the welfare of its inhabitants were utterly neglected, and in short in every branch of the administration, the same disorder, the same corruption existed, and not the slightest hope could be entertained that ere long a better form of government would be introduced.

But apart from this sad state of affairs, events of serious importance occurred to engage the attention of the Oudh Durbar during the year previous to annexation. A fanatical Maulvy, pretending to have received a divine mission, appeared in one of the districts of Oudh, and collecting a number of followers, proceeded to Ajoodiah (near Fyzabad), a place held in great veneration by the Hindoos, as being the traditional birth-place of their god "Ram," the scene of many of his exploits and of one of his "avatars." At Ajoodiah, amongst many other religious edifices, is one held particularly sacred, dedicated to the god Mahabeer, or Hunnooman, and styled in his honor, the Hunnooman Gurrie, or Fort of Hunnooman, the monkey-god. It

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is a large and irregular building, built upon a height and approached by a long flight of stone steps once rough and rudely shaped, but now worn smooth by the feet of pilgrims who for ages past have paid their devotions at the shrine of the god. The building is, in a measure, fortified, and in it reside several hundreds of Fakeers devoted to the worship of Mahabeer. These men are all armed, and in general are a stalwart, sturdy set.

The Maulvy pretended that some years ago, a musjid or mosque, had existed near the site of the Hunnooman Gurrie, and that the Fakeers in extending the building had either destroyed the musjid, or had incorporated it in the recent structures. His object was to rebuild the musjid, or should it not have been destroyed, to relieve it from all contact with the building of the idolaters. The Fakeers, on the other hand, denied the existence at any time within memory of man, of any musjid whatsoever, in the immediate vicinity of the Hunnooman Gurrie. They form perhaps one of the richest and most influential communities in India, and were fully prepared to resist the attacks of the Mahomedans, who had bound themselves by an oath to seize upon and destroy the Gurrie or to perish in the attempt. The Fakeers called to their assistance many of the neighbouring Rajahs. 8000 Rajpoots were speedily collected at Ajoodiah. The Maulvy's party numbered about 600 men, a desperate conflict ensued, ending as might have been expected from the disparity of the numbers opposed to each other, in the total defeat of the Maulvy, who fled, leaving about 70 of his followers dead on the field. This Maulvy was never heard of again, but was quickly succeeded by one no less bigotted. The 70 "faithful" killed in the late affair, were elevated to the rank of *martyrs*, and it was determined not only to destroy the Hunnooman Gurrie but to avenge their death. The Maulvy quickly collected 1000 followers near Mulleeabad, in the vicinity of Lucknow, and secretly favoured by the Nawabs and respectable people of Lucknow, determined to wage a religious and bloody warfare. Day by day his followers increased in number, the contagion was rapidly spreading beyond the limits of Oudh, and Bareilly, Rampore, Goruckpore, Azimghur, Jaunpore, &c., &c. were not slow to embrace the cause of the followers of the prophet, and

to aid it, by sending men and money. It was impossible to say how far or how fiercely the flame once kindled, would have raged. But there was a determined man in Lucknow, in the person of the Resident, Colonel (now General Sir James) Outram. The king and his ministers, although well aware of the nature of the impending danger, hesitated to avert it by the only possible means, the adoption of bold and decisive measures, but though outwardly appearing to discountenance the designs of the Maulvy, they were afraid to bring odium upon themselves, being Mahomedans, by striking at once at the root of the evil. The Resident, however, now interfered, he instructed the king to issue stringent orders to the Maulvy to disperse his rabble under pain of extreme punishment. These orders being of no avail, the Resident insisted upon the durbar sending out a strong force to arrest the further progress of the Maulvy, who had already commenced his march upon Fyzabad and Ajoodiah. The troops were soon in readiness, and following up the Maulvy's party attacked it at Shoojah-Gunj, thirty miles West of Fyzabad. The Maulvy was killed and his gang entirely defeated.*

The evil was for the present, at all events, averted, but who could answer for the future? Hatred between the Hindoos and Mahomedans had greatly increased, and who could foretell that it would not once again burst forth with redoubled violence and fury?

Such is a very brief sketch of the state of Oudh before annexation. It is foreign to our subject to give a detailed history of the Oudh durbar, at this period, although such a history would be replete with matters of no mean interest.

We see then, to sum up, on the throne of Oudh, a king imbecile, totally incapable of governing his subjects; we find the court full of corruption, the revenue swallowed up by minister, fiddlers, eunuchs, mahuls and courtezans, and in consequence the troops in long arrears of pay; we find the lower classes, the agricultural especially, suffering from intolerable oppression:

* So unchanging is the East! We have here an exact counterpart of ancient popular commotions. "Before these days rose Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves, who was slain, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed." Gamaliel to the Jewish Sanhedrim, Acts v. 36.

and above all, we find a religious war kindled in Oudh, threatening, in all appearance, to spread far and wide into our own provinces.

Such were the reasons which without doubt induced Government to bring Oudh at once within the red line.

Again—

Those who are and have ever been averse to the measure, will urge that Oudh has ever been a faithful ally of the Bengal Government, ever ready to furnish men and money in time of need and an enemy but to its ownself, what right had we then to depose its sovereign, (created by ourselves in the person of Ghazee-ood-deen Hyder, 1st king of Oudh) and in spite of treaties, make ourselves masters of his country?

It is for others to decide whether the fate of the ruler of Oudh was fairly weighed in the balance, and whether Lord Dalhousie was justified in sanctioning the annexation of the kingdom of Wajid Ally Shah.

Let us now consider what were on the people of Oudh, the effects of annexation. It was ruin to the durbar officials and their creatures—to those who in a more menial capacity flourished under its shade, chobdars, chupprassies, et hoc genus omne—to those artizans more immediately engaged in supplying the wants of the mahuls, in the shape of jewellery, trinkets, gold and silver-lace, &c. &c. to a whole host of pensioners to be found under an oriental Government, and whose duties it would be difficult to classify; it was ruin especially to the native Oudh Army; and on this latter subject, we will be a little more explicit. It will doubtless be to most persons a matter of surprise, to hear, that the Oudh Government entertained an army which, including a numerous body of camp followers, hangers-on, &c., &c. numbered no less than 50,000 men, infantry, cavalry, camel-corps, and artillery. Under the new régime the occupation of most of the members of this Army was gone, many of the native commandants, who, under the loose discipline of the late Government, were but under little or no restraint, could not wear the galling harness of the English rule, nor brook the fetters of stringent laws and regulations and discipline; deprived too, as they would have been of the means, they had formerly

enjoyed of enriching themselves; many of these men, accepted pensions, and retired from service. Others again who had not completed their fortunes, before annexation, entered our service, it is true, but only swallowed the bitter pill through necessity.

Colonel Outram, ever alive to the welfare of those around him, however humble their rank, issued strict orders to all Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners in Oudh, to entertain, as Police Chupprassies, &c. as many men of the late Oudh Army as possible. The same orders were issued to the commandants of the twelve corps forming the Oudh Irregular Force; but although a great number of the finest men were employed, several entire corps formerly in the pay of the Oudh Government, being taken into service, yet how many men were considered too old, too infirm, or of an appearance not suited for the rank of a "crack" corps. On the departure of Colonel Outram from Lucknow, the numerical strength of the Thannahs, Tuhseels, &c. in Oudh was considerably reduced, and thus the unfortunate men who had been admitted into service, were turned adrift. Nothing then but misery awaited these and many other equally unfortunate soldiers of the Oudh Army. Three regiments of Police, styled the Military Police, were also raised in Oudh on annexation. One would have supposed that the Oudh soldiers would, in most instances, had been admirably adapted to fill the ranks of these regiments; their local knowledge would especially have been invaluable, but here again too often, the measuring rod was the bane of many, and the want of an inch or two in their height was considered sufficient to deprive them of their bread.

But there exists another and the most important of all classes, whom annexation particularly affected, we allude to the Talookdars and Zemeendars—landholders of Oudh.

These men are almost all Hindoos of the Chuttree or Rajpoot Tribe—tradition states that the ancestors of many of them, followed the emperors of Delhi into Oudh and were rewarded by them, for their military services, by grants of land in that country —these grants were the basis of their present estates.

How far this may be in accordance with truth, we are not prepared to state, but certain it is that possession of the land by

the many clans of Rajpoots to be found in Oudh, is of very ancient date. Leaving aside the evidence as to this point furnished by the papers in possession of the Oudh district-Canoongoes, and by the documents held by the Zemeendars themselves, even a cursory glance at the internal economy of the Oudh estates, would show that they are of no recent origin, and one would be struck with the many points of resemblance which will be found between the system of clanship which obtains in Oudh, and that which in former years existed in the Highlands of Scotland.

On the British annexing Oudh, the Rubbee, or spring crops were ripe, for which a rapid settlement was made with the Zemeendars. Fortunate would it have been if this settlement, summary as it was, had been considered (with a slight revision) sufficient for the next three years, thus affording to Civil Officers an opportunity of making themselves acquainted with the nature of land tenures in Oudh, with the relation in which the landholders stood with regard to the late Government, and in fact with all those valuable data so necessary to ensure as great a degree as possible of success in the accomplishment of that most difficult task, the equitable adjustment of Government Land Revenue and of the proprietary rights of the Zemeendars. But no, the Rubbee settlement had scarcely been terminated, when a summary settlement to extend over the next two and a half years, (completing with the Rubbee settlement a period of three years) was determined upon. It became therefore absolutely necessary to complete this second settlement before the next or khureef crop became ripe, that is to say, in addition to the usual onerous duties of the districts, Civil Officers were required to effect this settlement over large districts numbering many thousand villages in the brief space of three or four months. It was taken as an axiom that Talookdars were of a necessity monsters of oppression, that they had seized upon the lands of their weaker brethren, and officers were instructed to restore during the settlement such lands to their defrauded owners. It must be remembered that when the officers proceeded to the district, they found but little or no data on which to found the settlement; it is true that the Canoongoes and Putwarees were possessed of imperfect records, but as soon as these functionaries

became aware of the intention of the settlement officers, these records were quickly falsified; besides this, the Putwarees, or village accountants, were the creatures of the Zemeendars.

Thus within a very limited period of time, without reliable data, or worse still on the strength of records more than suspected of having been falsified, in the face of all but insurmountable difficulties in the shape of imposition and deceit on the part of the Zemeendars who neglected not to bribe the Canoongoes and the amlah of the district officers, was the amount of revenue to be paid by each landholder to be fixed, and the validity also of his proprietary rights examined into. Can it then be wondered at, that under such circumstances, much injustice was, most unwittingly indeed, committed? It must also be said that the instructions as to the mode in which the settlement was to be carried out, issued by the Financial commissioner of Oudh, revised and revised again at subsequent periods, were, with some difficulty, understood; that they fixed no statute of limitation, so necessary to the determination of proprietary rights; that they entailed much unnecessary trouble and labour; and that the summary settlement was far from being uniform in the different districts of Oudh; for the instructions of the Financial Commissioner were not viewed in the same light by each district Officer. Thus not only, besides other evils, has uniformity been destroyed, but the too frequent modifications of the original system of settlement as proposed by Mr. Gubbins, unsettled the minds of the landholders, gave rise to endless appeals against the decisions of the district officers, and of necessity retarded materially the completion of the settlement. As a result then of annexation, many of the old Talookdar families saw themselves deprived unjustly of many of their villages; they saw that in future they should be suddenly obliged to pay their portion of Government Revenue regularly; they saw that the old feudal system, to which they had been so long accustomed, was at an end, that ere long their forts would be dismantled, their armed retainers disarmed, and as it were, a dead level established between themselves and those who, until now, had ever looked up to them as their supreme masters. What advantage then did the Oudh Zemeendar gain by annexation? Although it

must be confessed, that the country was most moderately assessed, yet this advantage did not, in his eyes, outweigh what were considered by him the great evils of the new administration.

We will now consider in what light annexation was regarded by another class, men serving in the ranks of the British army, of whom so many were not only inhabitants, but also Zemeendars of Oudh. Previous to annexation did a sepoy suffer any real or imaginary injury through the acts of the Oudh officials, or of his more powerful neighbours or Zemeendars, his written complaint was transmitted by the officer commanding his regiment to the Resident at Lucknow, who forwarded it for redress to the Durbar. In many cases these complaints were true, but in too many cases they were false, but the Durbar generally caused a decision to be given in favour of the complainant. The sepoy then, was no little man in his village and he assumed in the Oudh districts courts an air and insolent tone of superiority. We should therefore think, that to a great portion at least of this class, annexation was a distasteful measure.

But again, to the poor agriculturist, to the labouring poor, to the poorer classes in general, annexation was a blessing in the fullest acceptation of the word, and received by them as such.

From the above hasty and scanty sketch if we have viewed the subject in a proper light, it will be seen that by the generality of the influential classes of Oudh, annexation was far from being hailed with delight.

In conclusion.

On the 30th June, 1857, the siege of Lucknow commenced, the Residency was surrounded by hordes of rebel sepoys, but few, very few of the Talookdars in the first instance, joined the rebellion; subsequently, however, as the rebel government gained strength, as it sent out to the district its collectors of revenue backed by troops, and issued proclamations ordering Talookdars and Zemeendars to aid with their retainers in the common cause, most of the principal Talookdars obeyed the summons and made their appearance in Lucknow. Some did so willingly, smarting from the manner in which they had been treated on

annexation; others again did so on compulsion, fearing, through want of support, to set at defiance the orders of the Durbar.

Yet although the principal landholders ranged themselves on the side of the enemy—what then? Could we reasonably have expected from a newly annexed and warlike province, the same fidelity, the same allegiance that we had a right to look for from our old districts? We think, decidedly not. Oudh was annexed with the ostensible object of redressing the gross abuses that obtained in the country, and materially the people of Oudh had a right to expect much from the introduction of the new rule. The summary settlement was made, and by its operation crushed the hopes of the landholders. To assert, as has been done, that *all* the villages possessed by the Talookdars, had been wrested by them from their weaker brethren by violent and cruel means, is to assert that which in our belief cannot be borne out by facts. Instances indeed, many and frequent, will of course be found where villages had thus been seized upon, but this was only what might have been expected under the system of government which then obtained in Oudh. This, however, is far from stating that the Talookdar had obtained the *whole* of his estate in a similar lawless manner; a statement of this nature might just as well be applied to the old nobility of Europe, possessed of landed property which for ages past, has descended from father to son. No statute of limitation having been defined, it not unfrequently happened that the Talookdar was deprived of villages that he had held during nearly a century, and it may not be an unfair question to ask whether the same rule which was so detrimental to the interests of the one person, might not, with equal justice, be applied to the new proprietor? How did he originally obtain possession of the villages he now claimed from the Talookdar?

But Oudh will now necessarily be better understood, and if all that we have stated in this paper be correct; if it is true that Oudh has suffered wrong at our hands, if, from ignorance of the country or from any other cause, we have failed to render to the various classes, the justice that they had a right to expect at our hands, we should indeed be rejoiced to see under a new administration, all the evils, as far as possible, removed. We

should advocate a lenient policy, free and unconditional pardon to be given to all Talookdars (with a few glaring exceptions) who return to their allegiance, we should give back to the Talookdar every village that he held previous to annexation, and allow him to hold them, until by the operation of a Regular and not a *summary* settlement, based on just principles, patent and strict enquiry as to the validity or otherwise of proprietary right, could be instituted. There is no point on which the Oudh Zemeendar is so touchy as on the subject of land, and not an acre of it should he be deprived of, without very cogent reasons. —Let it, however, be well understood that we do not advocate the cause of those wretches whole hands are stained with the blood of our countrymen, or who have proved themselves guilty towards them of cruel treachery; we do not either advocate the cause of some who, notwithstanding repeated warnings, still continue amongst our bitterest enemies, let such receive their well deserved reward. But with regard to others not so situated, should the Policy we have hinted at be adopted, we have but little doubt that the Oudh Talookdar will become as loyal and faithful a servant to the British Government as he has ever done, (notwithstanding his occasionally lawless life) to that of his former rulers.

Once the Talookdars are fairly settled, it will easily be imagined of what immense assistance they will be in the carrying out of Police arrangements, and in securing and delivering to justice the sepoys of our late army of whom numbers are to be found in every village of Oudh. But they must be supported by the presence at the important stations of Oudh, of European troops. It cannot be expected that Talookdars and Zemeendars however willing they may be to do so, can boldly come forward without support, exposed as they certainly would be, to certain ruin if not death, at the hands of the numerous gangs of rebels still roaming at large in the country. Unfortunate has it been, that more than one Zemeendar has already paid the penalty of having shown his allegiance to the British.

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